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Class Presentation on *Death of a Salesman*

It can be very difficult for some people to be honest with themselves. Although there are many reasons that one may lie about himself or herself, this lie can have the power to control one’s ability to function. In *Death of a Salesman,* the reader can clearly see that the Loman family has a chain of lies that continues to build throughout the play. Some may think that one needs to lie so that he/she can have a more optimistic look on life but this view is actually hindering the person rather than helping. The character in *Death of a Salesman* that seems to build his life on lies is Willy Loman. Willy Loman has a very important task in this play. He is the “breadwinner” of the family; however his duplicity is causing him not to be able to function. I argue that Willy Loman’s lies in this play makes him become very contradicting and allows him to notice that his life is not as “successful” as he thought it was.

Willy Loman in the beginning of Act 1 sees himself as the “Big Shot” salesman. For example, when he is explaining the business to his sons, he says that “You take me for instance, I never have to wait in line to see a buyer”, he mentions that all he has to do is say his name and he is able to go right to the buyers (33). Willy has this impression that his well-liked attitude and appearance are taking him far and making him able do whatever he wants and purchase whatever he needs. However, after talking to Linda about their finances a couple of moments later, Willy quickly realizes that his debt is more than his income. Moreover, he also realized that if business does not pick up, he does not know what he will do (36). Although this scene was a flashback in this Act, the lie that Willy tells his son makes them think that everything is alright and that their father did not have to put in a lot of work since everyone knew him and liked him. But the reality of the situation was that they were struggling to make ends meet.

In addition, Willy’s affair with the woman in Boston is proof of another way in which he deceived his family. The fact that he never tells his wife Linda about his infidelity shows how dishonest he is and how little he values his relationship with his wife. He makes his wife think that he only has “eyes” for her by saying, “You’re the best there is, you’re my pal, you know? On the road I want to grab you and just kiss the life outta of you” (38). Willy is being delusional and not speaking the whole truth. Although he does mention that he gets lonely on the road, he does not tell his wife that every time he goes to Boston, he meets up with a woman and also gives this woman stockings. When Willy yells at Linda to put away her stockings (39), the reader can only imagine her confusion about why her husband is so angry about her mending her stockings. Moreover, Willy also borrows money from Charley and gives it to his wife as if it was his hard earned income. This is a falsehood to himself as the “breadwinner” of the family. Willy really wants to be successful but the occasion for him to be is not unobtainable. This is the reason why throughout the play he refers to the offer that Ben made to him long ago about Alaska. He especially is pensive about this offer in Act 2, when he realized that his wife has suffered a lot and he cannot continue going the way that he is headed (125).

In this play, dishonesty hides the true reality of the Loman’s lives. Willy’s lies shows that he has a pride that he would not let down because he wants others to think that himself and his family are successful people. For instance, he lies about Biff being offered a job by Bill Oliver to Bernard (92). Then, Willy later contradicts himself when he tells Bernard that “nothing good ever happened to Biff” after the age of seventeen (92). He expresses to Bernard that he does not know what went wrong with Biff. This is when Willy starts to ponder and wonder if it was his fault for Biff’s downfall. This made Willy feel unsuccessful at being a father/role model to his son. Willy not being able to cope with reality is what causes him to constantly reflect on his life, and these reflections ultimately make him very delusional. The lies he told to others caught up to him and eventually lead to him committing suicide because he couldn’t handle the reality of his life situations. Success was everything to Willy Loman, and because it was difficult for him to achieve it, he lied about it and ultimately never recovered from his prevarications.

**Discussion Question:** What are some benefits that the Loman family would have experience if they did not live a life filled with deceitfulness?